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IN EUROPE (U.S. HELSINKI COMMISSION)

January 4, 2021

Mr. Clay Bright
Commissioner
Tennessee Department of Transportation
James K. Polk Building, Suite 700
505 Deaderick Street
Nashville, TN 37243

Mr. Randall Tatum
Administrator/City Traffic Engineer
Division of Engineering
City of Memphis
125 N. Main Street, Suite 668
Memphis, TN 38103

Dear Commissioner Bright and Mr. Tatum,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposal to eliminate the direct connection between Poplar Avenue and Scott Avenue. I have been contacted by several constituents with questions and concerns about the closure and the public input that was taken in developing the proposal.

It is my understanding that the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) is developing a bridge replacement project on SR 57 (Poplar Avenue) over SR 23 (Walnut Grove Road), CSX Railroad, Illinois Central Railroad and Scott Street in Memphis. The new bridge design will eliminate the direct connection to Poplar Avenue from Scott Street and require residents and business owners on this section of Scott Street to access Poplar Avenue by utilizing Mimosa Avenue and Tillman Street.

Prioritizing safety and ensuring that our roads and intersections do not exacerbate avoidable hazards is critical, but I am concerned that this proposed project will present challenges for

tractor-trailer rigs that make frequent deliveries using the Scott Street ramp from Poplar and have the unintended consequence of creating other safety issues. As stated in a recent article in the *Daily Memphian*, “Without the Scott/Poplar connection, an 18-wheeler will have a challenging time turning from Mimosa onto Tillman... Such a turning motion has been made even harder by the recent construction of The Hampline, a protected bike route along Tillman... Another issue... is forcing the tractor-trailer rigs to travel through residential neighborhoods.”¹

While I understand that the current intersection has “slight distance constraints” and a “lack of space on the bridge deck for storage of left-turning vehicles,” it appears that the proposed route would present new safety concerns, including directing tractor-trailer rigs near schools and a family-friendly apartment complex. I would appreciate gaining insight from your departments as to how this proposed closure has taken the aforementioned factors into account and how it was determined that this route would indeed be safer.

Additionally, many residents feel that they have not had an adequate opportunity to provide comments or concerns on the proposal. It is my understanding that a public notification about these design changes has not been published. I strongly believe that any proposal that so dramatically alters the flow of traffic should be vetted by the relevant property owners to ensure all concerns are addressed. I would appreciate learning from your departments of the public notification timeline and how the impacted stakeholders will be consulted before coming to a final decision.

I appreciate your prompt attention to this matter and look forward to discussing these issues further.

As always, I remain,

Most sincerely,



Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

¹ Bailey, Tom, “City, state plan to sever Poplar from Scott Street,” *Daily Memphian*, https://dailyMemphian.com/section/metrocity-of-memphis/article/18913/city-state-plan-to-sever-poplar-from-scott-street?utm_source=email_edition&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=morning_2020-12-24